

Falling for a view

Chris and Robin Hutt were drawn to their East Sussex house by its stunning views over the Sussex Weald, but the garden's steeply sloping site brought a frustrating set of problems

WORDS STEPHANIE DONALDSON
PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

The garden at Fairlight End is perched on a ridge close to where the undulating Sussex Weald begins its steep descent to the sea. The 18th-century house is at the highest point in the garden with views down the slope over abundant borders and velvety lawns that are punctuated by clusters of specimen trees and shrubs. Beyond and below are the wild-flower meadows and the ponds with a backdrop of the gloriously unspoilt Wealden landscape.

Eleven years ago, when owner Chris Hutt was 57, and semi-retiring from business life, he and his wife Robin moved here from Cambridge. "We had always lived in the city and never had more than a postage stamp-sized garden," says Chris. "I knew that one of the things I wanted to do with the extra time I had was to make a garden on a decent scale and to do that we had to move."

When the Hutts first saw Fairlight End, the garden was an entirely different shape and a third of the upper garden didn't exist. "It is a very odd piece of land," explains Chris. "The fall from the road to the bottom of our three acres is fifty foot from one side of the property to the other. Every single part of the



Curvaceous lawns wind past neatly trimmed trees and topiary to areas of wild flowers where three clipped *Crataegus x lavalleyi* 'Carrierei' provide interesting year-round structure.

Below, left to right

The 18th-century red brick house is tucked into the top corner of the garden, sheltered by mature trees and overlooking the entirety of the garden.

The greeny-white umbels of the perennial *Cenolophium denudatum* interweave with the blue spires of *Nepeta* 'Leeds Castle' and the upright stems of the white-flowered *Centranthus ruber* 'Albus'.

A sinuous decked path leads to two sun loungers (from Cane Line). Their contemporary style is echoed by a Corten steel low wall and hedge of *Pinus mugo*.

In brief

Name Fairlight End.
What Country garden on a steep slope that becomes increasingly informal as it falls away from the house.
Where Close to the coast in East Sussex.
Size Three acres.
Soil Clay over sandstone, improved by the addition of copious quantities of mushroom compost and grit.
Climate Very mild but windswept by prevailing westerly winds.
Hardiness rating USDA 8a-9b.

Coping with a sloping garden

- **Expert advice will prevent costly mistakes.** Chris soon realised that the initial landscaping he'd done himself was unsatisfactory because he didn't understand proportions and principles. He now wishes he'd collaborated with landscape architect Ian Kitson from the start.
- **Earthworks can be costly and are messy,** but they are the only way to create generous planting areas on a steep slope, especially where the ground slopes in all directions as it does at Fairlight End.
- **Use sympathetic landscaping materials;** the Corten steel is contemporary, but its colour echoes the brickwork of the house.
- **Paths should slope gently** so they're still usable in wet or wintry conditions; steps are essential where a slope is too steep for paths.
- **Slopes tend to be windy,** so select only plants that will stand up and look good in the wind.
- **A slope or steps gives you the opportunity** to place plants differently. Some plants, such as *Stipa gigantea* and hellebores in spring, look particularly good when approached from below.

